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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: A Spirit of Unity

Transcribed Message
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Romans 15:5-6

There's a little poem that I think captures Romans 15 verses 5 and 6 very well. It says: "To dwell above with saints we love, oh that will be glory. To live below with saints we know, oh that's another story." Well, as you might imagine, the Bible has a lot to say about something like that. It has a lot to say about the glory of heaven. It has a lot to say about life here on earth and not just a little bit but rather a lot. Jesus, in his high priestly prayer in John 17, in fact the longest portion of his prayer has to do with this whole matter of unity within the body of Christ. Isn't that amazing? Here he tells us he's praying for us. He tells us not only was he praying for the disciples that were right there with him, but he looked down through the corridor of time and he says he was praying for us this morning, that as the body of Christ at Covenant we might walk in the spirit of unity. The apostle Paul as you read his epistles is constantly bringing to the churches that he's writing to this burden that he has with regard to this matter of their unity and their oneness in Christ. Francis Schaeffer in two of his books, *The Church Before the Watching World* and *The Mark of the Christian*, the focus and the emphasis that he brings so well in each of those is this very matter of what does the world see when they look at the church. Do they see truly a group of people who love their God and who love each other and walk in the spirit of harmony and unity? Or do they see, what we so often know that they see in the life of different churches, not a very good picture oftentimes of this matter of unity? In these verses this morning verses 5 and 6, we want to see that to understand and apply these specific verses 5 and 6 that's to know the heart of our Father. These verses are just going to simply put before us the heart of our Father for Covenant Community Church in 2024. It's as simple as this. Live this and please your heavenly Father.

So we do a very quick Romans reset and we've already noted many times that in the opening 11 chapters of Romans this is heavily doctrinal materialism. I looked at that

and I thought you could also say it is heavenly doctrine, and you could also say it is heavy doctrine. It's all of those things in those opening 11 chapters. Paul steps into some of the great doctrines of our faith. The opening chapters he takes us right to the righteousness and the holiness of God and the demands of that holiness and righteousness in the light of the sinfulness of humanity and the need that brings forth God's judgment upon that. Then he launches into these wonderful words like propitiation, reconciliation, redemption, justification, sanctification, predestination, election. All of these words that are oftentimes very challenging for us but just a part of this section.

Then in chapters 12 to 16 Paul says in light of all of that doctrine, what does that mean in terms of its impact on your life? We don't want to fall into the trap that says doctrine is not practical. Some people say I don't want to do a doctrine class. Then you're missing the whole point of the Scriptures because doctrine is always practical. Doctrine always demands to be lived out in life and so that's what Paul does in 12 to 16. He says in light of all of these amazing truths, what does that look like in your daily life? here's the impact of that. What does he say? Three things in particular.

He says first of all you need to take a look at yourself. A sense of self-awareness is just so crucial. It is amazing how many people have no sense of self-awareness. It is in large measure I think because they're not standing before the mirror of God's word. That's what the word of God does. It's a mirror to us that should cause us to be incredibly self-aware. When Paul says in Romans 12:3 don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. That's how he starts off this section with regard to how does the doctrines of the faith impact you. one of the things it does is it makes you very self-aware. It makes you walk in the spirit of humility.

Then secondly what about how you see others? In 12:9 he says make sure that you're loving each other well. Abhor what is evil. Love each other well.

Then the third point is how do you get along with each other when you don't agree with each other. That's really of course the crux of these verses in these chapters that we've been looking at now for these past few weeks. In light of that, how is it that we get along with each other? How do we live out our faith when we disagree with each other? I would just note this once again. We observe the fact that Paul doesn't tell us

that these differences somehow are to be disregarded or to be ignored. He doesn't live with the sense that all of these differences are somehow going to just disappear. No, he lives in reality. The reality that he lives in is that we have to figure out how it is that we're going to walk with each other when in fact we at times disagree with each other. That's the nature of life on earth. In our fallenness, we're not always going to treat each other well or always agree with each other.

So in answer to that question how do we learn to live with each other when we disagree with each other? What's the answer to that? It is simple as going back to points one, two, and three. Take a look at yourself. Take a look at others and how you see them, how you treat them. and then think in terms of how it is that you're to live in light of that.

Then there's this additional thing and that's what we come to in verses 5 and 6. It's really a prayer for unity. That's what he gives us. It's a prayer for unity. How do we walk with each other when we disagree with each other? Here Paul is going to help guide us through this and I'm just going to walk us through this and ask and answer four questions.

The first one is who, and the answer is God is the source of all that we need. Look at the very first phrase in verse 5. "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you..." We're going to stop right there with the word "you". May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you. Just think for a moment with me about that answer to the question who is in view here. He takes us to God to whom we have just sung and he says God is the source of all that we need.

Here we are at the threshold of the beginning of a new year. 2024 is starting. The reality is we brought a lot of stuff from '23 into '24, haven't we? What a good reminder to us that God is the source of everything that we need. That stuff at work, that stuff within our home, with our kids or our spouses or some other relational matter. Just think of all of the things that we can come to and we can say right at the beginning God is the source of all that we need. What a great reminder.

But I want you to see first of all Paul's heart. This is typical Pauline. Paul will argue passionately and then he'll just break into fervent prayer. That's what he does. All of his epistles have examples of this, or many of them do, where he's arguing a point

with great passion and it's almost like the Spirit of God just tells him to stop and pray for these people. That's what he does here. He is arguing this point and then he comes to verses 5 and 6 and he begins to pray for them. It is just a picture of his heart.

Remember back in verse 4 he said what was written was written for our instruction and the context of that obviously is the Old Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament Scriptures are what is in view because those are the things that had been written beforehand. But it isn't just the Old Testament Scriptures because now we're in at a point later into the life of the early church and so other things have been written. For us, we can look back at that and we can say this is not just Old Testament but also the New Testament that we're to appeal to and to see what the heart of God is and what Paul's concerns are.

The reality is this: people are people. The church today in 2024 is not that different than the church of the 1st century. Their issues were different. We aren't talking about eating meat and foods and things that they were, but we have our issues too that we disagree about. People are people. The tendency of our hearts is to be people who are prideful and to be people who are selfish. I imagine if we had a room full of marriage counselors and we had them in here and we said if you could help people with two things in the marital issues that you're dealing with, the family issues, whatever they are. if you said what if you could take out pride and you can take out selfishness, what percentage of problems do you suppose would go away? Like about 95%, right? This is just the heart of Paul for these people that they would learn from the Scriptures what it is that God has for them, what His intention is, what His heart is. The church today, like the church in the 1st century, is not a perfect place.

We can say I'd love to be a part of the 1st century church. Really? Go read the book of Corinthians a couple of times. In Galatians the struggle that they were having even understanding the nature of the gospel. There isn't a perfect church. If you find the perfect church you know the line that follows that: don't stay there because it won't be perfect anymore. We bring ourselves into that. I just want you to see the heart of Paul for these people and his desire for them to overcome these points of division and disagreement.

Notice at the end of that opening phrase when he says may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you. See that word “you”. That’s a plural you. He specifically is making the point. he’s not at this point writing to those who are strong and saying hey you who are strong, this is what you need to do in the light of this. And he doesn’t single out the weak and say you that are weak. He’s done that. We’ve seen that. He has spoken to both of those groups. But here in this point, his prayer for them is for you, all of you, you in the plural. I want all of you to understand this. The point that he’s making is you need each other. The point he’s making is you need each other. We live in a world that is hostile to our faith and we need each other.

I came across this article just this week. A guy wrote an article called “Why You Should Attend Church in Person this Sunday”. Now this isn’t really fair when it’s 1° outside and a -17° windchill index. People have rightfully in many cases chosen to stay home this morning, but he makes some great points. He says, “Whether because of health concerns or simply out of preference for watching online in their pajamas, 30 to 49-year-old churchgoers now attend church far less often than before Covid. God’s word insists that individual Christians need congregational worship.” And then he gives like five things that should cause us to be wanting to come together. He says, “Show up to stir up.” So from Hebrews 10 consider how to stir up each other to love and work. “Gather to make it the last day.” Same thing. As you see the Day approaching, just living in the light of the Lord’s return. “Gather to evangelize the lost. Christians gathering together visibly and regularly at the same time and the same place so those on the outside identify them as a distinct group.” There’s something that they value when they come together. Number four. He said, “Gather to display God’s glory to the universe.” Then number five. Gather to declare Christ and equip his people. He just puts before us what Paul is saying here: we need each other. That’s a part of Paul’s heart.

Now notice the second point: it’s God’s gift that Paul was praying for. Paul sees God as the provider. God is the source of all that we need. When he says, “May God grant you...” May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you, it’s a gift. He’s praying that God would gift us, that he would bless us with these things. It takes us to James chapter 1 verse 17 where James says that every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variable nor neither shadow

of turning. Everything that we need he provides and he does so out of the abundance of his grace and his mercy to us.

In particular the two things that Paul wants these believers in Rome to realize they need, they need endurance and they need encouragement. Now who doesn't need a good dose of endurance and encouragement. That's what Paul's praying for them here. He is praying that they would experience endurance and encouragement. This matter of endurance. God gives us as a gift endurance. Can you think of anything going on in your life right now where a good dose and a gift of God to you of endurance wouldn't be incredibly beneficial and helpful? We can all think of things where we just need God's gift of endurance. It is simply the idea here of bearing up under pressure. That is the word for endurance – to bear up under pressure. When it comes in context here he's speaking specifically about these matters over which Christians are rubbing each other a little bit the wrong way and he is saying I'm praying that you will have the spirit of endurance towards each other. Be gracious to each other in this matter.

Then of course he says we need encouragement. We need encouragement and God gives us encouragement. God is the one who gives us these gifts. This isn't the proverbial idea of let go and let God. I don't read that in Paul's writings. I don't read that in Peter's writings. I don't read that anywhere in my Bible – let go and let God. That's not what he is saying to us here. There is within the heart of Paul a prayer that he's offering to God that God would bless us as a church with endurance and encouragement, but that doesn't mean we don't have any part in it. We don't just sit back and let go and let God. There is personal responsibility with this as well. God is the source but people are the means. God often uses people to bring a sense of endurance to us and encouragement to us. That is why Barnabas is lifted up in the New Testament as such a wonderful example to us because he literally is the son of encouragement.

We have to ask: am I an encourager or a discourager? Am I someone who is answering the prayers of Paul in that time in the life of the church at Rome, and also am I answering the prayers of people today by bringing a spirit of endurance and encouragement to people in my life? don't miss the connection to verse 4. Remember in verse 4 he said remember the instruction that you received in the writing of God's word. He takes us back to the value and the benefit of the word of God. When I look at this in

light of the prayer that Paul is offering here, there are three essential things. He's just talking about this matter of reaching out and having a sense of total dependency upon God. That's recognizing that God is the source of everything that we need so that's number one. This sense of total dependence. Number two is the word. That's verse 4. And now the third one in verse 5 is prayer. What a beautiful trilogy of things to hold on to. A sense of dependence on God, to be understanding of the value of God's word in our life every day, and then prayer. So who. The answer to that is God.

The second question is what, and the focus is on one another. Now look at the next part of verse 5: "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another." We'll stop right there. The focus is going to be on one another in this next phrase that Paul gives. He wants us to live in harmony with one another. Literally it's to think the same thing. The word here is to think the same thing. Be in the same mind. Look back at chapter 12 and verse 16 when he says: live in harmony with one another. Same thing. Same phrase. Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sights. The very things we just talked about in the earlier description. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 10, "I appeal to you brothers by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you but that you be united in the same mind and in the same judgment." That was a prayer that was written to a church that was mightily struggling. In 2 Corinthians chapter 13 and verse 11: "Finally, brothers, rejoice. aim for restoration. comfort one another. agree with one another. live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you." In Philippians three times Paul talks about this matter of having the same mind, of being united, being in harmony with one another.

What is in view here when Paul is offering up this petition? Well, it isn't that we would live in uniformity. When he says I want you to be of the same mind, he's not calling us to uniformity. He is not saying to us at Covenant I want you all to look the same, to act the same, dress the same, think the same. no, that is not New Testament Christianity. That's not what God calls us to. He doesn't call us to uniformity in that way. He doesn't call us to that kind of conformity.

How do we know that? When Paul says I want you to be of the same mind, how do we know that he doesn't want us all to look, act, think, speak, say the same thing?

Why isn't that a valid consideration? Wouldn't it be wonderful to be in a church where everybody looked the same, talked the same, thought the same? would you enjoy that? Would that be wonderful? Dr. Hendricks used to say about marriage when he would talk to a couple and he would say how do you guys get along? Do you get along? Do you have disagreements? If they would make so bold as a statement to say no, we don't have disagreements. We always get along. He would say then one of you isn't needed. That's the point. we know from the context that's not what Paul has in mind because he just started off the 14th chapter by introducing the idea of opinions. This whole context he's talking about the fact that as Christians there are areas in which we disagree. So we know that when he says that he wants them to be in harmony, he is not talking about uniformity or conformity. He is acknowledging that in the secondary matters there are things over which we are not going to agree and don't agree.

What is in view? If it is not uniformity or conformity, what do you have in view? It is simply that is how you treat one another. That's what he has in view. It is how you treat one another. When he says may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another ... What he has in view is how you treat one another. Way back when we started in that 14th chapter we put a whole list of things on the screen over which Christians may very well disagree. Not the essential things of the faith. That's not in view here. We do well to remind ourselves that that's the case. There are essentials to our faith that we have to anchor to and we have to hold onto. When you join Covenant Community Church, there are just essential doctrines of our faith that we have delineated that you are asked and are required to say I agree with those things. You can't have a different opinion about the deity of Christ and be a member in good standing at Covenant. You can't be non-Trinitarian and be a member in good standing at Covenant. You can't think there's something in addition to faith and trust in Christ alone for salvation and be a member in good standing. On those primary issues he's not talking about that.

Back to that point, Paul would say you do need to have some conformity. You do need to be absolutely in harmony. But in the secondary matters over which Christians disagree, things of secondary importance with regard to doctrine. Oftentimes when I do a new members class, inevitably someone will ask what about this. It's some point of

doctrine or truth and I say that we simply haven't stated specifically what it is that we ask people to believe about that because we recognize that there are many differences of opinion about that. We acknowledge that within the body that is true. We have differing ideas about things that are of what we call secondary importance. We don't all agree on which sports team to support. You have a team for the playoffs that you're pulling for and somebody sitting next to you may be a fan of the team that you're playing today. We all of course agree on politics so that one we don't have to worry about. You can think of all kinds of things in which Paul could rightly say I don't expect that you're going to all agree on that, but here's what I do expect. I do expect that you are all going to treat each other well. That's what he is saying. When he says be of the same mind, be living in harmony with each other. I don't expect that you're going to agree on every point of minor doctrine or differences of opinion about lifestyle choices and opinions with regard to how it is that we apply God's word to a specific area of our life. but he says I do expect that you all going to treat each other well. You're going to love each other. You're going to honor each other. You're going to respect each other. You're going to speak well to each other and of each other. That's what he's saying to us here and I think that's what is so vitally important.

How big a deal is this? How big a deal is this? We said at the beginning in our big idea that this is the heart of the Father for us as a church and it is simply drawn right out of the pages of Scripture. So how big a deal is this? This is a big deal. This is God's heart for Covenant – that we treat each other with honor, respect, and love. As you read the New Testament, you see how big a deal this is. One of the ways that you see that is there are lots of one another commands. There are lots of one another statements, some 30 different statements. Just look at this list that is pulled right out of the Scripture. Many of them are repeated multiple times. This is what Paul envisions. This is what he has in mind when he says I want you to live in harmony with each other. I want you to live in such a way that you have the same mind as each other with regard to how it is that you treat each other and view each other.

When you think in terms of the imagery that the writers of the New Testament use as they talk about the church, what are the most common images that the Scriptures of the New Testament writers use? The first one that comes to mind is family.

You might say that's not so good because my family fights like cats and dogs. Well, I know, but the ideal picture is that a family. A family is a picture of people who love each other, care about each other, and treat each other well. Then you have of course the picture of the church as a building and all the pieces fitting together. The church as the body and all of the interconnectedness. You have these images of the church as a family, as a fellowship, as a body. That all points to this matter of our connectedness to each other. All of them underscoring unity. I have an obligation to you and you have an obligation to me. This is the heart of biblical Christianity. We're to be connected to one another. We are connected to one another by the Holy Spirit. You can't live out New Testament Christianity without each other. It is just that simple. That's why that article on why you should be gathering together on a weekly basis is so important. That's why this statistic of those aged 30 to 49 who are increasingly choosing to stay home and watch TV on church in their pajamas is an absolute contradiction of New Testament ecclesiology. You have to be together with each other to fulfill the obligations and the commands there on that list of one anothers. You can't do that at home watching church on TV.

There's an article that came across my desk just this week. It's an advertisement for a new book, *Love the Ones Who Drive You Crazy* by Jamie Dunlop. "Insist that our differences are not so much a bug within the local church but a feature, and not so much a problem but an opportunity. The differences and disagreements that threaten to tear your church apart are filled with potential to proclaim the glory of our God and our gracious God. This perspective changes so much about the way we relate to our fellow Christians. It means we must center our church on Christ alone so that instead of pursuing complete conformity we learn to tolerate differences in the classic definition of the word tolerance. We applaud diversity in our churches. We applaud diversity in our churches and pray for more diversity, never contemplating the cost and challenge that comes when God answers our prayers." Isn't that great? So we want to see the diversity in the body of Christ. We ask God to make us more diverse. God, bring more Democrats to Covenant Community Church. Bring more Republicans, bring more Independents, bring more people who see the world differently than we do. Bring more ethnicities. Bring more people who don't look the same. We desire that. We want the

church to reflect what the church is going to look like in heaven. Then we realize that invites a lot of other things that we have to learn as Paul has spoken of here to live with each other in harmony and respect and love each other well.

Look at this next thing. The third question is how. How are we going to do this? The example that we follow in the next part of that 5th verse. "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus." So it's the example of our Lord that he points us to. The first thing I want you to see is this is what we see in the Godhead. This unity is what we see within the Trinity and I think that is good to just acknowledge here at the beginning. God is made up of three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three and yet one. Right within the context of the doctrine of the Trinity we have this beautiful picture of how unity looks and manifests itself, and how within the Godhead there is this beauty that functions between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and all of these different ways that they relate to each other.

From that of course then he points us to the life of our Lord. It's ultimately the example of Christ that we look to. It takes us back to that 3rd verse that we already noted. Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Jesus never thought of himself more highly than he should have. He always had the exact understanding putting other people constantly before himself. Think of the example in the life of our Lord. Verse 7 he's going to say the same thing. When you just look ahead to that 7th verse here in this 15th chapter we'll look at Lord willing in a week or so: "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God." Think of Hebrews 12 where for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross. The joy to save us was the motivator. Think of John 13. Jesus washing the feet of the disciples, this disgusting task that these guys didn't want to do for each other. The Lord of glory wraps the robe around himself and washes their feet. All of these images are what Paul wants us to think of. I'm pretty sure that he wants us to see the Lord in that way. In Ephesians chapter 5 walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God.

Now why do we do this? Why do we do this? He says in verse 6 it is all to the glory of God. "That together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our

Lord Jesus Christ.” There's the purpose of it all. There is the purpose of it all. The goal and the aim. Look at the first word of verse 6. That. That is a purpose clause. It is introducing the aim and the goal for everything that he has said. You come to the 6th verse and he is wrapping up now his thoughts and he is saying everything that I said at this point is now pointing to this goal, this aim, this desire, this purpose – that we would glorify God.

Now what's the second word of verse 6? The second word of verse 6 is together. That together. He is underscoring this reminder again of this interconnectedness., this need that we have for each other, the importance of relationships. We're just right at the beginning of the new year. Again, I understand we're in a little different setting this morning, but if you haven't jumped into a community group yet, this is the time to do it. If you haven't joined a small group there's all kinds of women's groups, there's all kinds of men's group, there's all kinds of small group Bible studies. If you haven't gotten involved in one, this is what this is calling you to. Jump and become a part of one of these. Develop relationships. Be connected to each other in the body of Christ.

The ultimate goal in all of this is making much of God. Making much of God. This is *solo Deo gloria*. This is all to the glory of God. God is the one that we want to lift up and make much of. It is saying that God is supremely good, that God is great. What is it that most honors God in this context? What is it that most honors God? It's that we treat each other right, that we walk in unity, that there is harmony with each other. Right there it is in front of us. Do you want to bring glory to God? Do you want to live out your life in a way that glorifies God? He says this is the way to do it.

One of the things that I include in the new members packet is the peacemaker brochure. If you have not heard of the peacemaker ministry, it is a wonderful ministry. they have what they call “The 4 G's of Peacemaking”. If there were only two choices and we asked your family, we asked your closest friends, we asked your work associates, and they had to pick between two words to describe you, and those two words were peacemaker or troublemaker, what would they pick for you? Would they pick that your tendency in relationships is generally to be a peacemaker? Or is your general tendency to be a troublemaker? You only have those two choices. What would most likely characterize how you would be described? The peacemaker ministry says

there are 4 G's that help us to be peacemakers. When Paul says walk in harmony with each other, live in such a way that you're treating each other well, G is glorify God. Glorify God. Just think of any conflict that you have in your life right now. Just think of any relational conflict that you have in your life right now. It may be a conflict with your parents, or a child, a spouse, a coworker, a friend. It may be somebody sitting in here. There's conflict between you. If the very first desire of your heart in the midst of this conflict is you want to glorify God, I always say that pretty much changes the whole direction of the conflict, doesn't it? If you really want to glorify God in the midst of this conflict, then that's going to take a whole bunch of stuff just off the table that aren't even options for you. The next G is get the log out of your eye, which is kind of like Romans 12:3 and Romans 12:9. Go and be reconciled. Gently restore. Wonderful principles that speak to this matter of what Paul is talking about here.

Now look at that phrase: "That you together may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." I like that phrase glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is just linking the essential nature of Christ to that of the Father. He is underscoring the deity of Christ.

The last thing. We're all singers. Why do this? It's all to the glory of God. That's the purpose of it all. Making much of God. He again says that you together may with one voice. The word you there again is a second person plural so it is everybody. He is not saying those of you that are strong, I want you to be singers. Those of you that are weak, I want you to be singers. No, it's everybody. Everybody is to be a singer. We're all to be singers. We gather together the first day of the week and one of the things that we do when we come together to worship is we sing. I just look at this and I say right within this context we have a picture of New Testament Christianity and what it looks like in the 1st century with regard to when they gathered. And what did they have? They had the word of God. We have the word of God. They had prayer. We have prayer. Verse 5. They have verse 6 singing. Singing.

If you don't mind another shameless plug to be in here at 9:30 because if you're not in here at 9:30 you can't be a singer with us. You can't fulfill one of the functions it seems to me that God has called us to be a part of. That doesn't count if you don't get here early and don't get in here by 9:25 and your voice is revved up and ready to go, or

maybe you just hum, but you're in here and you're a part of that group. He says sing together, giving glory to God, giving evidence of our unity.

Christians who do not love each other well do not worship together very well. Isn't that true? If you don't love each other well, it's very hard to worship and praise God together well. Can you imagine on some Sunday morning when you're in a point of conflict and disagreement and disharmony with somebody. can you imagine what it would be like to unexpectedly walk into the row and find a person that you're in this disagreement with all the sudden standing right next to you. It damps down your enthusiasm to praise and worship and sing with the vigor that God would want. Romans 15:5-6 is the heart of God for our church for 2024. We live this out and we bring glory to God and we please our heavenly Father.

What do we take away? God's blessing follows when we operate in the spirit of unity. Unity doesn't just happen. We have to pray for it. We have to work to maintain it, but it's always worth it. It's always worth it. True unity comes only when we understand and embrace the gospel together and that's what God calls us to. He calls us to understand the gospel that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. What Jesus came to do on the cross was to take care of once and for all the problem of sin that separates us from God. It created disharmony between us and God. God is the reconciler. He's the one who has come to make peace and make provision for us. If we will put our faith and trust in what Jesus did and what he did alone, God restores that harmony, that fellowship with him and he gives us the gift of eternal life. We would invite you to experience that for yourself personally this morning if you've never put your faith and trust in Christ.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank you first of all for this gospel, this glorious gospel. This gospel that reminds us that this barrier that exists between us and our holy God that Jesus has resolved and taken care of that once and for all and forever. There's no better news. There is no greater news. That's as good as the news gets. Father, to realize that we step into this relationship with you by faith and by faith alone. We do this in such a way that we give glory to you. We give praise to you. We give thanks to you. Thank you for this fellowship of believers called Covenant. Thank you for all of these local churches around us, Father, that love you, that love the gospel, that want to serve

you in this community well. We pray for ourselves individually. We pray for ourselves collectively that as the church of Jesus Christ in this community that we will live out this calling that you have placed upon our lives, this calling to walk in unity and harmony with each other, this calling to treat each other well, to honor each other, to respect each other, to love each other. Let that be the testimony so that the watching world sees a group of people who love you and who love each other. We pray in Christ's name, amen.